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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT  
TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2008

In Today's Papers

#### Turkey Bans Smoking in Public Places

All papers report a law prohibiting smoking in public places across Turkey entered into effect Monday. The law prohibits smoking in government offices, workplaces, shopping malls, schools, sports arenas, and hospitals. The ban also covers public transport including taxis and railway, seaway and airway transportation. The law also bans tobacco advertisements and tobacco sales to people under the age of 18. The smoking ban in restaurants, cafeterias, and coffeehouses will go into effect July 19 next year.

Mainstream Milliyet reports today the ban had little effect, saying some of the police officers responsible for enforcement were smoking in public buildings. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak believes the new smoking ban will succeed, and those who violated the ban were not aware of the new restrictions. Several papers cite a Guardian story which says the smoking ban would be a "deep cultural shock" for Turks.

#### Turkey Celebrates Youth Day

All news outlets report Youth Day was celebrated throughout Turkey yesterday. The national holiday commemorates the day Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, landed in Samsun to launch the struggle for independence. A group of politicians and top level bureaucrats led by President Abdullah Gul paid respects at the mausoleum of Ataturk in Ankara. Official ceremonies were held at Turkish embassies around the world and in Turkish Cyprus as well. Prime Minister Erdogan did not join the celebrations because of an eye-related health problem. A column in mainstream Vatan claims Erdogan, who attended a ceremony in the nearby city of Eskisehir on Saturday, did not participate in the ceremonies held Monday due to fears that he might be protested by a crowd gathered to mark a secular holiday.

Foreign Minister Ali Babacan Will Visit Washington In Early June  
Islamist-oriented Zaman reports Foreign Minister Ali Babacan will pay an official visit to Washington from June 3-9, and has asked for appointments with Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and the president's national security advisor

Stephen Hadley. Babacan is expected to address a think tank in Washington before moving on to New York on June 9 to lobby for Turkey's seat at the UN Security Council during 2009-2010.

#### Rice and Nechirvan Barzani Meet in Washington

Mainstream Sabah and NTV report Tuesday Secretary Rice met with visiting Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani in Washington. State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack said Iraq's internal politics and the PKK were discussed in the meeting, according to Sabah.

#### Editorial Commentary on AKP Closure Case

##### "A Formula to Ease Tensions"

Erdal Safak commented in mainstream Sabah (5/20): "Parliamentary Speaker Koksak Toptan has encouraged the Constitutional Court to come up with another formula instead of closing the AKP. Actually, since the beginning of the case, the AKP has received suggestions from inside Turkey and from abroad. Let me highlight one fact: The AKP closure case was not opened because the party amended the constitution to allow the headscarf in universities; the US and the EU played a major role in bringing the AKP to this point. Armed with a desire to topple Saddam Huseyin before September 11, President Bush wrapped up his ambitions in a project called, "The Greater Middle East Project (GMP)." He wanted to bring democracy to Islamic geography, from Morocco to Pakistan. When the AKP came to power in Turkey, it inspired the White House in its efforts toward its Islamic democracy project. Despite objections by prominent Turkish officials, US officials continually referred to Turkey as exhibiting "moderate Islam" and describing Turks as "Muslim

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Democrats" and Turkey as "the country accommodating both Islam and democracy." At the end, the GMP initiative failed, but, by then, Turkey was already labeled as "moderately Islamic." EU officials also referred to "moderate Islam" and "Turkey as an example for the Islamic world." Turkey-EU Joint Commission co-Chairman Lagendijk recently advised Prime Minister Erdogan to drop everything else from the AKP agenda and pursue reforms to strengthen secularism. I wish Lagendijk had come up with this advice earlier. Nevertheless, I agree and support Lagendijk's advice because that is the only formula to ease tensions in this country."

##### "Turkey Will Have A Hard Time Explaining The AKP's Closure"

Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet (5/19): "The AKP closure case is followed closely by Western and Arab diplomats. The Western world expresses their concerns by saying "in a democracy, the people determine the government by elections." All the ambassadors I talked to recently believe that this closure case is a "political decision" and the AKP will be closed in the end. This means if the AKP is closed, Turkey's democracy will suffer. Moreover, relations with the EU will be affected and those who oppose Turkey's EU membership will be emboldened. This situation will result in increased hostility toward the West. In short, the ban on the AKP will have a long-term negative impact on Turkey. Meanwhile, Ankara will dedicate all its energy explaining the closure case to the world. Unfortunately, these signals indicate that Turkey will have a hard time explaining this case."

#### Work Accidents Claim Two More Lives at Tuzla Shipyards

All papers reported over the weekend and today two more fatal work accidents at Istanbul's Tuzla shipyards. Twenty-one workers have died at the shipyards since July 2007. The latest victim, Murat Caliskan, fell 25 meters to his death from a welding platform while working at night. Mainstream Sabah carries Caliskan's lawyer's statement regarding the tragedy, "This is Murder, Not An Accident," Liberal Radikal blames the authorities for not enforcing safety measures despite the fact that such simple measures would help prevent deadly accidents. Labor Minister Faruk Celik said the fatal incidents were likely to continue: "There are 50 shipyards in an area that should only have 20 shipyards. If you certify so many shipyards in such a small area, then these kinds of grave incidents will continue to occur," he told the press. Main opposition CHP Leader Deniz Baykal criticized Celik for his remarks and demanded his resignation. Tuesday papers report shipyard workers will stage a demonstration to demand tighter safety measures at the shipyards.

TV News:  
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- Approximately 6,000 people were admitted to hospitals in the central Anatolian province of Aksaray since May 13 with symptoms including diarrhea that developed after drinking contaminated water.

- On Tuesday, the Turkish Parliament will discuss opposition CHP's censure motion against Prime Minister Erdogan regarding the sale of Sabah daily and ATV television to Calik Group, a holding group of companies close to the ruling AKP.

- Austrian President Heinz Fischer came Monday to Ankara as the official guest of President Abdullah Gul.

International News

- 200 Chinese workers were buried in a mudslide while repairing roadways damaged by last week's earthquake in Sichuan province.

- On Wednesday, the European Parliament will discuss its "Turkey

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Report" drafted by reporter Ria Oomen-Ruijten.

- Brown University Professor Arnold Ludwig told a gathering in Washington Ataturk was the 20th century's most important political leader.

WILSON